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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001661

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: SHARON TELLS CODEL LEVIN THAT SYRIA TRACK CAN WAIT

REF: TEL AVIV 1638

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: PM Sharon told Codel Levin that Israel should "finish negotiations" with the Palestinians before turning to the Syrian track. While expressing a willingness to negotiate without preconditions with Bashar, the PM said Syria would first have to dismantle terrorist organizations and bases. NSA Eiland assessed that Bashar's offer to negotiate with Israel was not serious in any event, and commented that the Golan Heights was only the SARG's third or fourth priority after regime survival, control of Lebanon, and, maybe, preservation of strategic capabilities. Eiland and DMI Chief Farkash pointed to what they called Hizballah's unrelenting support for Palestinian terrorism, with Eiland charging that Hizballah turned to "private people" to keep up attacks during last summer's "hudna." END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Members of Codel Levin raised Syrian President Assad's offer to open negotiations with Israel in separate March 14 meetings with PM Sharon, FM Shalom, NSA Eiland, and IDF Intelligence Chief Gen. Farkash. (Codel members were Senators Carl Levin, Jay Rockefeller, Jeff Bingaman, Jack Reed and Frank Lautenberg. Ambassador and emboffs accompanied them to all meetings. Codel discussions about Israeli withdrawal from Gaza were reported reftel.)

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First, the Palestinians  
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3. (C) After expressing his hope that U.S. pressure on Syria will not diminish, Sharon said he was willing to negotiate with the SARG. First, though, the SARG would have to dismantle terrorist organizations and bases and expel "several hundred" members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from Lebanon. He pointed to the threat Hizballah represents on Israel's northern border and charged that the IRGC and Hizballah are responsible for terrorist operations in Israel conducted by the Tanzim. He noted that Israel still has outstanding humanitarian cases to resolve with Syria, i.e., Ron Arad and the MIAs from Sultan Yaqub.

4. (C) Sharon stressed that the GOI would not accept SARG preconditions for the negotiations, including Bashar's suggestion that negotiations begin where they left off previously. FM Shalom also rejected SARG preconditions, but stated that he was "encouraged" by Bashar's offer and wished to begin negotiations immediately. Senator Levin asked Sharon whether the GOI has any preconditions. The PM replied that a return to the previous negotiations would be unacceptable. In any event, he added, the GOI would not give first priority to the Syria track: "Let's first finish negotiations with the Palestinians."

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Hizballah Supporting Palestinian Terrorism  
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5. (C) National Security Adviser Giora Eiland hinted at the one-track-at-a-time approach, commenting that "some" in the GOI believe that Israel cannot simultaneously negotiate with the Palestinians and Syrians. He assessed that President Assad's offer was not serious, in any case. Assad made the offer just to deflect U.S. pressure, he said. He also judged that the return of the Golan Heights is only the third or fourth priority for Assad, after regime survival, control of Lebanon ("much more important than the Golan"), and, possibly, retention of WMD and other strategic capabilities.

6. (C) Gen. Farkash posited that support for terrorism is essential for Syria, as "Syria without terror is an unimportant country." Eiland asserted that Syrian-backed Hizballah keeps pressing for terrorism against Israel to continue, even when Hamas does not agree. He claimed that Hizballah sent funds to the territories last summer so that "private people" could carry out attacks during the Hamas cease-fire. He said these people had been trained either directly by Hizballah, by trainers sent to the territories, or by Internet (e.g., for the production of explosives).

7. (C) Gen. Farkash claimed that Hizballah is now providing the funding and/or weapons for 95% of the attacks carried out by Fatah-related groups. He charged that Iran is stepping up

its support for terrorism via Syria, pointing to the allegation that Iran used Bam earthquake relief flights returning to Syria to ship arms.

18. (U) The Codel did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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